City Green

The Urban Gardening Program in Philadelphia

The Pennsylvania State University, Cooperative Extension Service, University Park, Pennsylvania

Today, with spiraling inflation, there has been renewed practical interest in plants and gardening. Last year alone more than 32 million Americans had home vegetable gardens. These gardens produced more than $14 billion worth of fruits and vegetables — eight percent of the total that consumers spent on domestically grown food.

In 1977 the Congress of the United States recognized this rekindled interest in gardening and its potential value in reducing food costs among inner-city low-income families, who spend as much as forty percent of their total budget for food. As a result, Congress gave limited funding to support urban gardening programs in several inner-city locations throughout the country "to assist in teaching and demonstrating gardening, as well as nutrition assistance in our large cities...."

Philadelphia is one of sixteen cities throughout the United States participating in this federally funded Urban Gardening Program. The program in Philadelphia is administered by the Cooperative Extension Service at The Pennsylvania State University in partnership with the United States Department of Agriculture, Science and Education Administration.

In this publication Libby J. Goldstein, Philadelphia's Urban Gardening Coordinator, tells you about some of the accomplishments of the program — a program designed to help people become more self-sufficient in their way of life.

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Introduction

From the start Philadelphia has been a place of gardens and gardeners. William Penn's original plans for a "Greene Countrie Towne" called for four open blocks, or squares, that would be planted as parks. Three of those squares can still be found, and the fourth is a beautiful round island in the midst of traffic on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway — still planted and the site of a monumental fountain. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Philadelphia was the site of a large community garden program conducted by the Philadelphia Vacant Lots Cultivation Association. Their Sixteenth Annual Report for the season of 1912 could have been written today.

"Our Motto: Increased Opportunity for Self-Help.

"Our Purpose: Not to give charity, but to open an opportunity for those in need to help themselves by their own work.

"Our Work: The cultivation of gardens by those in need, on unused land in our city, subject to disposition when the owner wants to use the land."

Four hundred forty-two families gardened some seventy acres of vacant land in Philadelphia in 1912. Today the numbers are closer to 6,000 families on forty acres, but the problems are much the same as those expressed in 1912: "...it is strikingly evident to anyone who is in daily touch with the poorer classes of our people, that they are finding it extremely hard to make both ends meet. It is pretty generally acknowledged that the high cost of living is a problem to be solved."

In 1912 a family was assigned 7,260 square feet of space for its garden. These days the size of a community garden is likely to be some 5,000 square feet, and a family's plot is usually 200 to 300 square feet. Our present vacant lots had numerous buildings on them in 1912, and the soil now is more likely to be clay fill and bricks than the original sandy loam of the region. Still, with the addition of locally available organic matter, even first-year gardens have been quite productive. Indeed, while crop reporting was uneven, to say the least, most of the families reported harvests worth $76 to $200, and many reported values of $200 and over for 1978. These figures don't include the crops that were canned or frozen for future use.

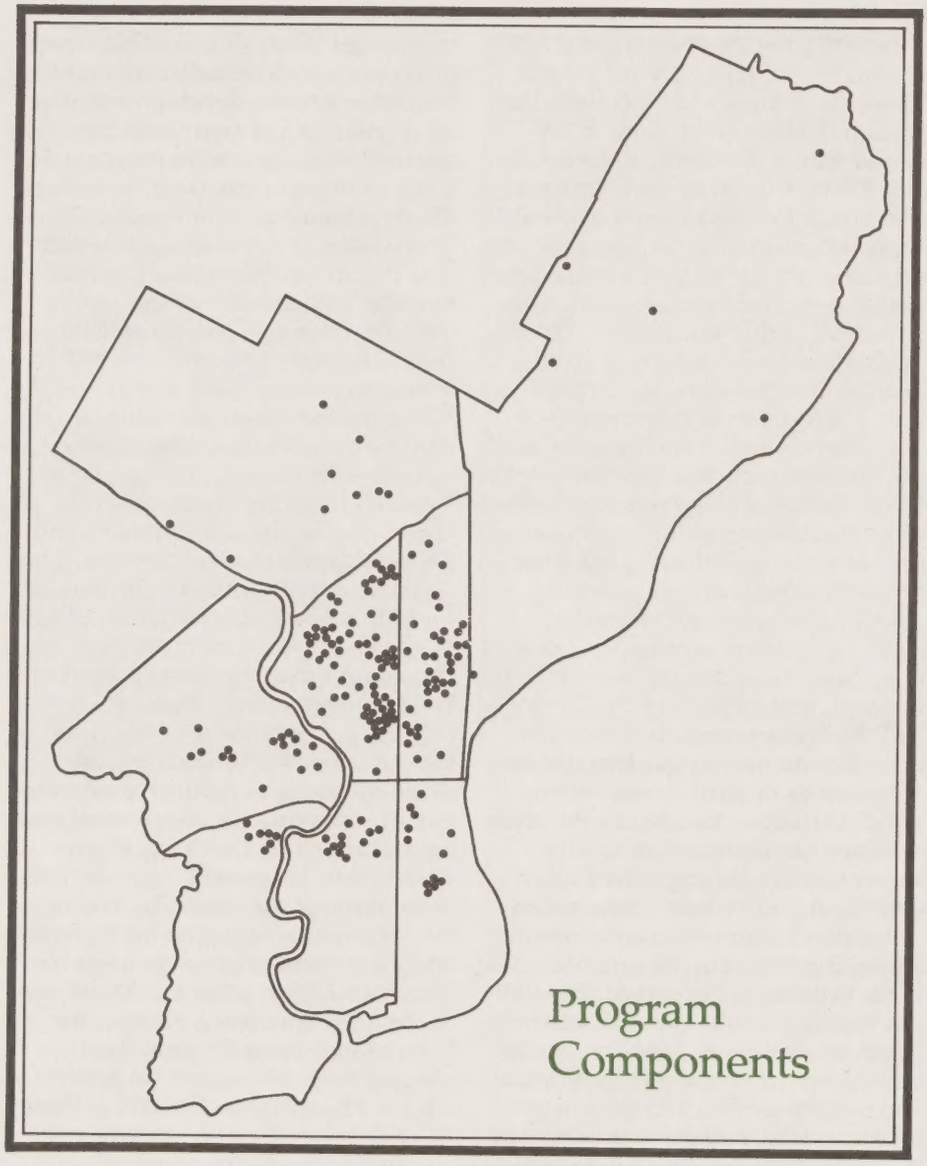
Most gardeners also reported growing enough surplus to give to neighbors, to senior citizens living in the area, and to passers-by. During a 1977 budgetary crisis in Pennsylvania, four community gardens donated 175 pounds of garden vegetables, which the Urban Gardening Program collected for distribution to fifty-seven families through the Philadelphia Allied Action Commission.

But don't suppose that community gardening ended in the early decades of the century to be revived only with the funding of the Urban Gardening Program. There were victory gardens during World War II on public lands, and in 1959 the first 4-H garden project was established in Philadelphia by the Cooperative Extension Service.

It was the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society that took the lead in establishing a community gardening program in Philadelphia neighborhoods in the 1970s. Starting with two gardens in 1972, the Society was responsible for the development of nearly 100 vacant lot gardens by late winter of 1977 when the first Urban Gardening Program employees appeared on the streets. Indeed, the Society housed the program coordinator's office in that first year.

And it was in part through the Urban Gardening Program's advocacy that the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society applied for, and received, a $250,000 grant from the Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development for its Philadelphia Green program, which included community vegetable garden development. The association of the two staffs has spurred them to creative program development and expansion, as well as the development of new educational approaches and materials. Cooperation on such projects as the Community Gardeners' Harvest Party, the City Garden Contest, and the annual Grand Tour of Gardens has been exceptionally successful.

The federal funds available to The Pennsylvania State University Cooperative Extension Service for the Urban Gardening Program can be used only for the development and delivery of educational services. The physical development of gardens, aside from our demonstration plots, has been accomplished through cooperative arrangements with the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society and other organizations. We have been most active in encouraging neighborhoods to get into gardening and in supplying the educational and organizational know-how, know-where, and know-who to help them carry through successfully. We've also urged local agencies, institutions, and businesses to invest in neighborhoods and their gardens. At the end of the 1979 gardening season, the Urban Gardening Program had worked with 204 vacant lot garden sites in Philadelphia. Several of these have developed on their own, using Urban Gardening Program educational materials and aid without recourse to institutional sponsorship.



Program Components

All Philadelphia is divided into eight parts *(Omnia Philadelphia in octō partes divisa est)*.

Since there are large groups of low-income residents throughout Philadelphia, we simply divided the city into eight parts along those streets that Philadelphians commonly use for defining areas like the "Northeast" or "Southwest Philly": Market Street, Broad Street, Front Street, and Baltimore and Hunting Park avenues.

Each of our garden assistants is assigned to one of the eight city areas and acts as county agent to all its neighborhoods. The garden assistants hold workshops, planting demonstrations, and seminars on food production, preparation, and preservation for block groups, schools, churches, and social service agencies, as well as 4-H groups. We hold most of these meetings right in the neighborhood, usually at one of the 212 community or demonstration gardens, sometimes in someone's kitchen or a city library.

In winter our staff members run workshops for garden coordinators, 4-H leaders, and other volunteers (the Grow Patrol) at our county office or at the offices of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, Antioch College, and other central locations. Occasionally we get outside experts. Most recently Professors C. Marshall Ritter and Peter A. Ferretti came down from The Pennsylvania State University to conduct outdoor workshops demonstrating pruning and renewing tree and small fruit plantings to the Urban Gardening staff and interested volunteers.

The county home economist, Jacqueline Wirth, held canning and freezing workshops for gardeners and their neighbors all over town — in church kitchens, in Housing Authority community centers, and in people's homes. The extent of urban home food preservation activity was surprising to all of us, although it shouldn't have been. Many urban gardeners, particularly in black and ethnic neighborhoods, come from rural backgrounds, bringing with them the practice of home food preservation. Self-sufficiency is an important ingredient of their life-style.

Dial-a-Tomato

Neighborhood groups and individuals who want to contact a garden assistant about gardening, nutrition, or food preparation and preservation are invited to call the Garden Phone — 224-7870 — which operates daily in winter from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and in summer from 8:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Garden assistants have answered some 4,000 calls since the Garden Phone came into being in April 1977. Questions from "Don't you get gourds if you plant cucumbers and squash too close together and the roots mix?" to "What can I grow with a soil pH of eleven?" provide some of the on-the-job stimuli that keep our staff on their toes. Garden assistant Sally McCabe said, "It seems that I've learned ten times as much in the past year as I did in four years at Penn State."

City Green

Some 7,000 families throughout the city receive *City Green*, the monthly newsletter of Penn State's Urban Gardening Program. Initially a monthly quasi-magazine, *City Green* has sprouted into a monthly one-page information and schedule sheet on

growing and eating vegetables and fruits, and a quarterly multipage publication. The latter, in the tradition of the original, has columns by staff and gardeners about gardening, cooking, wine-making, and garden-related activities and projects. The quarterly is edited by Wanda Larrier, and the new monthly *City Green* is edited by Robin Dorfman and Terry Mushovic, along with their other duties as garden assistants.

Grow Patrol

This volunteer organization is very loosely structured. It includes the more than 200 garden coordinators and other interested gardeners who enjoy both gardening and working with their neighbors. In 1978 Grow Patrol members helped to judge the City Garden Contest and to organize and judge the Community Gardeners' Harvest Party. One group with access to a pickup truck hauled compost from the Fairmount Park Recycling Center to neighboring gardens. Members have arranged for Urban Gardening Program and county staff to give workshops for their neighbors, have held workshops of their own, and send out their own newsletters.

Super Carrot and the Puppet Show

When puppet masters are available, Super Carrot and his friends (created by a 4-H clothing club in northeast Philadelphia) visit schools, 4-H clubs, day care centers, and other places where children gather. They talk about nutrition and about their friends and enemies in the garden and how to deal with them.

The Demonstration Garden

Our most visible and basic program element is the demonstration garden. We initially developed eight such gardens, one in each of the eight areas of the city. These areas, however, are not the same as "neighborhoods,"

which are much smaller enclaves — sometimes only two or three city blocks. Thus while a South Philadelphian may tell a stranger, "I live downtown," she will define it further by naming her parish if she's Catholic, or by naming the street corner nearest her house. She may also tell you, "I thought this was a community garden. Those people don't come from 'round here. They live all the way down on Second Street" (a block away).

Clearly, in a city where neighborhoods and "turfs" are so narrowly defined, the development of eight demonstration gardens for educational purposes presents many problems. Eighty might have been a more effective number. However, several of our intrepid garden assistants have laid out additional demonstration plots in community gardens.

With some modifications, we adopted the highly successful garden development procedures of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. Generally, several neighbors hear about the program and ask for assistance in the development of a vacant lot in their neighborhood. We help them determine ownership of the lot, and they get permission to use it — when the owner is still to be found. The neighbors clean all trash and debris from the land, and the Urban Gardening Program arranges for the delivery and spreading of organic soil amendments, plowing, and purchase of fencing and posts. The neighbors raise the fence and mark off garden plots themselves. They also recruit gardeners, decide whether the garden will be farmed communally or in family plots, and generally manage the entire enterprise.

We have seen too many successful neighborhood self-help activities disrupted by the sudden arrival of uncertain funding and then virtually destroyed by its disappearance. We intended to avoid this trap by encouraging self-sufficiency in the community garden. Thus, garden coordinators are all volunteers. Gardens are the neighbors' gardens. The community members decide how their garden will be run, and they run it.

However, if they want their site to be designated a "demonstration" garden, the gardeners must assign one plot to a garden assistant. And they must be willing to let visitors from all over the city and sometimes even the country come peer at their garden, often without warning. And we hope they will be willing to try some nontraditional gardening techniques, at least if the newer methods worked on the garden assistant's demonstration plot.

Yes, But What Did You Demonstrate?

The 12th and Wallace streets Demonstration Garden

isn't there. Gone are the scarecrow, the brick-lined paths, the senior citizens' special place, and the flower bed in the corner. That lot had been vacant for nearly twenty years: a whole community had been displaced in an earlier effort to "redevelop" the city. Now housing is going up right on top of the garden, and as the neighborhood is renewed, most likely the gardeners will be displaced again.

But for a while the 12th and Wallace Garden will live again two blocks away. It is a testament to a wonderful and energetic lady, Mrs. Almena Monteiro, that the garden has lived and bloomed in the midst of decay and neglect — of both the people and the place. Even the soil that she built so carefully at 12th and Wallace has moved to the new garden, thanks to the incentive her coffee and homemade bread gave to friendly workmen.

The gardeners at 12th and Wallace could barely communicate with one another. Some spoke Spanish. Some spoke English. And some were barely in any condition to speak. But they would come to work their gardens early — before the bar opened. Luckily, the first garden assistant in "Mees" Monteiro's area, Roberto Trinidad, spoke English and Spanish. And so it started in 1977.

Even with the organic material we provided, the soil on the lot was a joke. Twenty years of trash-dumping and disuse had certainly not helped, even though the lot had supported a good grass cover. And despite all the brick and rubble underneath, drainage was awful. We came by to see the garden one day that first year to find trouble. The soil pH was so high that the peppers were actually suffering from alkali burn. So "Mees" made a deal with the local Linton's restaurant to cart away their used coffee grounds for them. Before they decided it was more efficient to throw the grounds away, "Mees" had lowered the pH enough to pick a good crop of peppers, beans, and sweet potatoes.

"Mees" told about the coffee grounds cure when she appeared on KYW-TV's *Farm, Home and Garden* show with Gary Geers. That appearance won audience acclaim from Mrs. J. I. Rodale, wife of the founder of *Organic Gardening* magazine, and from Mrs. Rose Feinstone of the Sol and Rose Feinstone Foundation, which later presented the 12th and Wallace Garden with a $200 award for community beautification. The award was presented at the 1978 Opportunities Industrialization Centers Key Dinner.

In 1977 the U.S. Department of Agriculture published its yearbook, *Gardening for Food and Fun,* and invited Mrs. Monteiro down to meet Secretary Bergland and tell all the notables about gardening in the city. "Mees" had promised to bring along her famous zucchini bread, but she created a real sensation by bringing several gallons of her equally famous blackberry wine. "This is wonderful!" the Secretary said. "Make sure Mrs. Bergland gets some."

"Mees" Almena Monteiro gives her recipe for zucchini bread to Mrs. Bob Bergland.

This year "Mees" conducted two wine-making workshops for urban gardeners in her kitchen on North 12th Street. She and the new garden assistant for her area, Charles Young, have also written a "how-to" sheet on home wine-making, and her recipe for tomato wine was published in *City Green.* She also caused a fair amount of political ferment in trying to keep her garden. The results were not quite so satisfying, but she did find some good friends in the Congress, the Pennsylvania General Assembly, and the Philadelphia City Council. But then, "Mees" finds good friends everywhere.

Program Coordinator Libby Goldstein shows one of the garden assistants, Charles Young, a newly installed compost bin at Southwark/Queen Village.

Southwark/Queen Village Community Garden

was ending its second season when it heard about the Urban Gardening Program and wrote to Penn State asking for the Philadelphia money to expand its four-tree orchard, start a canning center, and perhaps plant a woodlot along I-95 where it tore through the eastern edge of the neighborhood. The Queen Village Neighbors Association was planning to secede from the city and was going to assure its food and energy supply.

Queen Village did not get the money. It hasn't yet seceded, and the Chair of its neighborhood gardens committee has had to resign because she was made coordinator of Penn State's Urban Gardening Program in Philadelphia. But this and other preexisting gardens (28th and Cambria, and 56th and Haverford) were brought into the demonstration program because we wanted to show people that gardens could support three or four crops during Philadelphia's growing season, and we needed these gardens to show early spring production of crops like mustard, peas, snow peas, chervil, kale, and spinach.

The Southwark/Queen Village Demonstration Garden is located on Christian Street between areas occupied by white ethnic Americans, a growing new middle-class population, and the Southwark Plaza development of the Philadelphia Housing Authority, most of whose residents are black and very poor. The present Chair, Mrs. Cleotis Toran, lives in Southwark Plaza. The garden is worked by all the neighbors and is one of the few in the city with such a socioeconomic mix of gardeners.

In 1976 there were fifty-two plots on this garden site, including four set aside for the Southwark Plaza children's garden and one for the Southwark Child Development Center. In 1977 the Housing Authority removed about 350 cubic yards of concrete from beside the garden so twenty more plots and the orchard site could be developed. The productivity of the new gardens has proved that where soil isn't available or suitable, a growing medium can be created that will support intensive gardening by a fairly large group of people. The cost to the program of these new gardens was $200 for trucking in fifty-four cubic yards of compost.

Mr. Sonny Hicks, who lives next to the garden, is the proprietor of a stable and carriage company. It's not uncommon to see him in his top hat drive up to a Queen Village row house in a shiny carriage with a pair of high-stepping ponies to pick up a giggling bride for the ride to St. Philip's or St. Stanislaus, two or three blocks away. Mr. Sonny also delivers a generally offensive byproduct of his business to the garden — and the gardeners love him for it. What's one man's horse manure is another man's fertilizer.

In the meantime, the country's first (we think) community orchard has grown from four trees won in a gardening contest to include dwarf peach, cherry, apple, and apricot trees, and grapevines, provided by neighbors and the program; and a whole patch of Heritage raspberries donated by the Guyer family in New Jersey. Peach tree problems are second only to tomato problems in calls to the Garden Phone, giving the impression that Philadelphia County is the largest peach orchard in the state. Of course, most of the county's fruit trees are scattered about in people's backyards, so the public planting at Southwark/Queen Village serves a real educational purpose. Millard Hunt, the garden assistant in South Philadelphia east of Broad Street, has already held a public workshop in the orchard. In 1979 several tree and small fruit workshops will be held there.

The raspberry patch will be a source of plant material for other gardens. Low-income folk can't afford the store price of berries and usually don't have any way to get to pick-your-own operations. City gardens can make a real economic contribution by producing valuable or rare crops like brambles, gooseberries, herbs, and ethnic vegetables.

Fifteen Hundred Grays Ferry Avenue

was begun by the Urban Gardening Program in 1977 as the Southwest Philadelphia Demonstration Garden. It's one of many vegetable and flower gardens on the "West Bank" of the Schuylkill River, where people garden on the railroad right-of-way, in empty lots, and on top of old building foundations.

Mrs. Mattie Robbins, coordinator of the garden, was a nutrition aide with Philadelphia's Community Food and Nutrition program (CFN) when she decided that her neighborhood needed "one of those federal gardens." By the time Robbins was finished in 1977 she and her neighbors had two gardens: the 1500 Grays Ferry Demonstration Garden and a garden at 47th and Linmore streets sponsored by the Horticultural Society. By 1978 Robbins was also coordinating CFN's five-garden pilot project for the city, and her block had won a prize for container gardening in the City Garden Contest, as well as numerous prizes at the Community Gardeners' Harvest Party.

We had arranged to relieve the management of the Philadelphia Flower and Garden Show of the burden of disposing of unsaleable used mulch at the show's end in March 1977. Since the Grays Ferry Garden is near the Civic Center, we selected it as our "dump site." We were trying to determine the minimum level of soil preparation for the average garden so communities without institutional support could start gardens of their own. But by July of 1977 the soil depth at Grays Ferry was barely three inches, hardly qualifying it as the average garden.

Nevertheless, Robbins and her cohorts managed to grow enough vegetables to freeze and can a surplus for winter use and to contribute substantially to the emergency food distribution in August when the Commonwealth's budget crisis held up welfare check distribution for several weeks. Questions from Mattie on how best to preserve cushaw and other Southern specialties kept our county home economist stepping all season.

The head of Penn State's Horticulture Department and our Extension home horticulture specialist were clearly not pleased with the looks of 1500 Grays Ferry in 1977. However, compost from Fairmount Park, manure from the University of Pennsylvania's School of Veterinary Medicine, more Flower Show mulch, and a couple of loads of mushroom compost not only increased the garden's productivity, but made it look so much better that it was included in the 1978 Grand Tour. Even our specialist was impressed by the improvement.

In the beginning, passers-by had taken the garden for a public recycling center. And that's not all they took. Fifty-five-gallon drums, mulch, and logs intended for building terraces just walked off the site, followed by enraged phone calls by Mrs. Robbins. However, the garden finally looked like a garden, and recycled materials remained in place. Mrs. Robbins and the gardeners built a sweet potato terrace at the base of one hill, using old automobile tires to hold the hill in place. Our summer aides, supervised by garden assistant Edward Castella, pitched in with a model rat-proof compost bin. Robin Dorfman, the Southwest Philadelphia garden assistant, terraced her hillside demonstration plot with old joist boards and installed a drip irrigation system fed by one fifty-five-gallon drum stacked on another. Of course, as soon as Robin got her system in place, we had twelve straight days of rain, the sort of thing that gives urban gardeners an intimate understanding of their rural brethren's problems.

Common Ground, a five-acre community garden sponsored by the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority in Southwest Philadelphia.

Picking and peering at Newhall Community Garden in Northwest Philadelphia.

The Awbury Demonstration Garden

in the Northwest Philadelphia area is probably the most rural of our sites. It's in an old field surrounded by the woods and wild brambles of Awbury Arboretum, operated by the City Parks Association of Philadelphia. The Arboretum is all that remains of the grand estates of the Germantown/Mount Airy neighborhood and is surrounded by row houses, small stores, and multifamily dwellings. The neighborhood, which has been undergoing substantial economic and racial change, prides itself on having been able to maintain a multi-ethnic composition. Unlike other arboretums and nature centers in the region, Awbury directs its programming specifically toward its low-income neighbors.

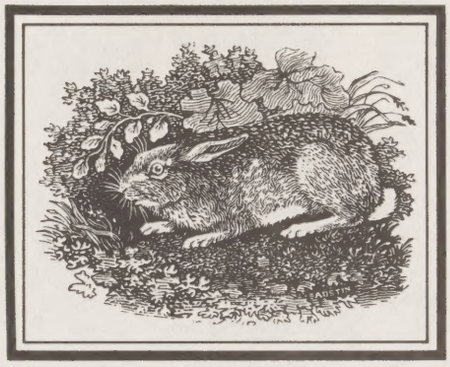
What can you say about a city garden with two feet (!) of top soil? It makes other gardeners crazy with envy, but it still requires work. The weeds grow to immense proportions as soon as you turn your back. So the garden assistant, Terry Mushovic, and the gardeners mulch and mulch and mulch. This year they found a landscaper in need of a wood chip dump site. While their soil is terrific, their water supply is not, and the mulch really helps retain moisture as well as restrain weeds.

Rabbits have been the major vandals at Awbury. In the garden's first season, grown rabbits would watch proudly as their offspring squeezed through the garden's turkey-wire fence to munch on tender lettuces and cabbage. We suggested these vandals might provide a source of supplementary protein, but the softhearted gardeners added a chicken-wire base to their fence instead.

In 1977 two of our garden assistants were given access to an entire drum pound by Publicker Industries, so now several of the gardens, including Awbury, use a drum water-storage system. One plot at Awbury is set aside to be used as a common area. Their four steel water-drums are here, as well as the rabbit-proof compost bin. In mid-season Terry got a load of manure dumped at the common area for everyone's use. Many of the gardeners didn't use it at first. They were leery of putting anything that smelled like *that* on vegetables they were going to eat. But when they saw it was being used by the most successful gardeners they literally dug right in. Terry often found the interchange among gardeners a great educational tool: "They have a great deal to share with each other by example and experience," she said.

Because none of the gardeners wanted the title of coordinator, Awbury Garden has a coordinating committee. In 1978 the committee charged each gardener a plot fee to cover the cost of supplementary tools, seeds, plants, and the like. At the end of the season, the grateful gardeners contributed their surplus funds to the donor of their garden land, the City Parks Association, for the continued restoration of the Arboretum.

A cold frame is now extending Awbury's gardening season into February at one end and December at the other. No rest for these gardeners or their soil. The compost bin helps the soil, but the gardeners (who freeze, can, and make wine with their garden produce) may start praying for snow and ice.



Mr. and Mrs. Carl Reed put their "green thumbs" to work at the West Philadelphia Demonstration Garden.

The 56th Street and Haverford Avenue Demonstration Garden

developed for West Philadelphia is by far the largest: 65,000 square feet, a real farm by city standards. It is cosponsored by the Haddington Leadership Organization, which manages a number of other gardens, all quite large, in an area that has long been leveled for renewal. Like many city gardens, all the Haddington gardens, including 56th and Haverford, are on land owned by the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority. A large shopping center has been scheduled for construction to the west of the garden, but work has not yet begun. Haddington began development of 56th and Haverford in 1976 with contributions of seed from WCAU-TV and Radio, single-strand fence from the Darby Fence Company, and hours of back-breaking work by prospective gardeners who removed enough rock, concrete, and rubble to rebuild the entire block.

In 1977 we undertook development of the site as one of our demonstration gardens. Our advertisement for a garden assistant brought forth one of the Haddington Leadership Organization's gardeners, Wanda Larrier, a graduate of Walter Biddle Saul Agricultural High School and Michigan State University. Wanda is still a gardener at 56th and Haverford, but her plot is now the demonstration plot for all of West Philadelphia, and she is also the editor of *City Green* quarterly. One of the first extraordinary crops she grew there was grain amaranth. We recently asked how it went, and learned that while her family had eaten the greens, her mother had thrown out the grain, the *whole* crop, by mistake. Just another adventure in the life of a city farmer.

In 1978 a library was completed across the street from the garden, just in time for a cutback in operating funds. However, the library project has benefited gardening in the area. With Wanda's encouragement, the contractor donated the library's construction fencing to a group that wanted to start a garden but couldn't obtain agency resources for site development.

The gardeners at 56th and Haverford use organic methods wherever possible and are really adventurous growers. In 1977 Mrs. Hazel Felton grew Philadelphia's only stand of sugar cane. Initially, it was for her grandchildren, but they went south for the summer, so Mrs. Felton sold her crop to a Jamaican grocer in the area. He sold it to his homesick customers for twenty-five cents a piece. Mrs. Felton also wrote an article on growing sugar cane in the *Green Scene*, the magazine of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, and was paid for it.

Gardeners at 56th and Haverford have also grown wrapper tobacco, cotton, and vegetable soybeans, one of the crops we have been encouraging because of its high nutritive value, good flavor, and because you just can't buy green soybeans in the market. They also grew peanuts and white sweet potatoes. One is tempted to suggest they apply for crop subsidies to support their garden, but since they made $200 at a plant and cake sale in the summer of 1978, they'd probably turn up their noses at the paperwork involved.

In 1978 Mrs. Felton and her fellow gardeners displayed a harvest table at the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society Harvest Show, competing for prizes with garden clubs and really keen suburban gardening families. On the table were canned goods, vinegars, red okra, and beautiful flowers. They not only won first prize in their class, but a bronze medal for excellence as well. And the judges were tough! They didn't even award a second prize. The next group to place came in third, followed by two Honorable Mentions.

Meanwhile back home, where Mrs. Felton is block captain for neighborhood beautification, her block won a prize in the City Garden Contest.

A pocket garden at 629 West Diamond Street in North Philadelphia.

The Back to Nature Garden

at 28th and Cambria streets in North Philadelphia was started by Mrs. Annie D. Hyman, the coordinator, for her 4-H club in 1975 with assistance from 4-H, the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, and the Allegheny West Foundation. In 1977 the garden was expanded with our assistance so parents and other neighbors could garden with the kids. This year, in addition to expanding the garden, Mrs. Hyman and Joseph Janulewicz, garden assistant in North Philadelphia, obtained a grant from the Philadelphia National Bank to buy a tool shed and a wheelbarrow for the garden. Since all the children had grown up in Philadelphia, some of the grown-ups decided to sow a bit of history among the collards and okra, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, and peanuts. It became quite a game for the gardeners to escort visitors to a small group of plants and wait for the Yankees to identify—cotton.

Gardeners at all the sites have been resourceful in getting necessary tools, supplies, and soil amendments — by saving and asking neighbors and businesses to save garbage, leaves, manure, and wood chips. They've swapped plant cuttings. They've reclaimed old fences, broken shovels, used paint cans (for watering cans), etc. And they've wangled contributions from dozens of industries, businesses, organizations, and public agencies. One way or another they've gotten what they needed to carry on. A gardener at one site was heard to say, "Well, after the first bounce after they fell off the back of the truck, well, I figured they was ours."

But Mrs. Hyman is the champion at resource development. She has gotten so many cosponsors for her garden it would take a full page to list them all.

Janulewicz has written a Resource Guide to help gardeners convert a vacant lot into a vegetable garden independently, with little or no sponsorship. Some suggestions found in the guide are using pallets or skids for fencing and railroad ties for posts, purchasing vegetable seeds and plants with food stamps, and sponsoring fund-raising activities to gather money for garden tools. The guide lists a great variety of organic material that can be used either for composting, mulching, or soil conditioning. In short, the Resource Guide covers practically everything free in Philadelphia.

At 7:30 p.m. the night before the Harvest Party, it became obvious that one of the community gardens was not going to show its harvest table as scheduled. There it was: six feet of empty table in the very middle of the main display area. Mrs. Hyman volunteered to have her garden group arrange the table before 8:30 the next morning. They were out in the garden picking by 5 a.m. and had a whole new experience of the city. "It was so quiet," Mrs. Hyman said. "It was just like the country." She and her gardeners not only won a prize for their last-minute harvest table, they won so many prizes that they were among the Grand Sweepstakes prize winners and got an ornamental plant for their garden. Mrs. Hyman thanked *us* for the chance to enter the Harvest Table competition. Thank *you*, Mrs. Hyman.

Minnie Kaplan helps Lottie Hottel stake a tomato plant in the garden of a senior citizen apartment complex in Northeast Philadelphia.

The David Neuman Center Demonstration Garden

at 6600 Bustleton Avenue is on the grounds of the David Neuman Senior Center, in Northeast Philadelphia. The Center is sponsored by the JYC (Jewish Y's and Centers) and funded in part by the Philadelphia Corporation on Aging. Most of the gardeners are participants in the Center's congregate meal program, but some of them are neighbors attracted to the Center by the garden. When garden assistant Edward Castella asked one woman why she gardened she said, "Well, the vegetables really help when all you have is Social Security, but really, a lot of us used to come here to eat, but we hardly ever talked. Now we have the garden, and we have something to talk about."

In 1977 one of the gardeners bent over to weed her beans and couldn't straighten back up. It scared us no end even though she was back in the garden the next day — picking beans. So this year Castella and Mr. Jesse LaSmith, a senior aide assigned to the program by the city, built several raised, portable growing beds for physically limited gardeners. These beds can be gardened from a standing position or sitting on a stool. With slight modifications, they can also be used by people in wheelchairs.

Many of the gardeners at David Neuman have never grown vegetables or even flowers before, and most come from urban areas and small towns in Eastern Europe. Still, there are some very knowledgeable gardeners at the David Neuman Center, and some are very active members of the Grow Patrol as well. Lena Mae Fink, whose Southern accent always comes as a surprise, was a judge in the 1978 City Garden Contest. Showing more energy than many teenagers, Mrs. Fink traveled all over the city in the midst of summer with her judging panel. She also helped to judge the Harvest Party and worked on her garden's winning entries as well.

Racial tension and rhetoric in Philadelphia this past summer were stirred to frightening heights. For the first time some garden assistants and Pennsylvania Horticultural Society staff members reported unpleasant encounters on the streets, but not in the gardens. It was especially rewarding to hear one of the David Neuman Center gardeners say of the Harvest Party and the program, "Something like this is better for race relations than all the studies in the world."

Garden assistant Edward Castella and senior aide Jesse LaSmith build raised garden beds for physically limited gardeners.

We grew food too. Miss Esther Weintrob was flat on her back in a hospital when the garden got underway in 1977 and had never gardened before 1978. Although she couldn't bend, neither would she bow to infirmity; the raised growing beds made it possible for her to start a brand new hobby at age sixty-two. Miss Weintrob is an artist with a brush and proved to be an artist with a garden too. Her garden was carried all the way across town in our van to become the centerpiece of the Urban Gardening Program's exhibit (otherwise known as our "first ever exhibit in competition anywhere") at the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society Harvest Show. Miss Weintrob helped us win the PHS Harvest Show Trophy to an Outstanding Exhibit. And then she came down to the show to spend a whole day answering other gardeners' questions about her garden and how she grew it and what she harvested. Some lady!

Joseph Thomas, garden assistant Sally McCabe, and, second from right, Clarence Clough with some friends at the Garden of Adam and Eve God Bless America.

The Garden of Adam and Eve God Bless America

had a pretty typical start for a place that turned out to be as special as its name. One day in 1977, Mrs. MacDonald, a friend of the Grays Ferry garden coordinator, called to say that four houses had just been demolished at 22nd and Montrose streets and some men in the neighborhood wanted to start a garden there. Then a Mr. Thomas called and said they really wanted a garden and they had a little money and could maybe get some fencing, and could we help? So we went down to meet them at Brown's Store across the street from the lot.

They said they were tired of hanging around Brown's Store with nothing to do and nowhere to go. They were on Social Security or receiving disability pensions. They had farmed in the South and worked in the North, and now they were on the shelf. But not for long. They had to remove three truckloads of rock and rubble from "their" land before we could even start. Then they put up their fence and found a beautiful gate for it in an alley somewhere.

As the first year progressed, the men invited some of the neighbors to garden with them. They even had a plot for the kids. They built a tool box and benches and a table for checkers. No matter when you went to visit, you could search for hours and never find a weed or a plant out of its appointed place and someone was there to pass the time of day.

It rained a lot in August 1977, so the men put up a pole structure and covered it with canvas so they'd have a place to sit. They built themselves a super barbecue grill and held weekly barbecues. They even invited us once. By 1978 the structure had been enclosed and paneled and had a place to display all their ribbons and snapshots of celebrity visitors, and they were planning to install a refrigerator and maybe a pay phone. The Garden of Adam and Eve God Bless America is what recreational gardening is all about. It's their country club; each of the twelve gardeners has his own key to its gate.

When all the community gardens in Philadelphia were rated in the City Garden Contest, the Garden of Adam and Eve God Bless America came in first. They were awarded a special mention and a $50 gift certificate from the Otis Twilley Seed Company during the Grand Tour and were featured in the *Philadelphia Inquirer's* Sunday magazine section.

Since this garden was mostly the men's own doing, it's more than ready to graduate to independent status. So their garden assistant, Sally McCabe (who already has three plots at other gardens), will start a new demonstration garden in their area in 1979. The men have their eye on a new site, too. Some more houses were demolished around the corner, and the men of 22nd and Montrose can't stand to see people and land left idle.

Two 4-H kids and their pet zucchini.

Who Got the Message?

Besides the eight demonstration gardens, Penn State's Urban Gardening Program has contributed educationally to 204 community gardens and 32 4-H gardens. We've made garden visits, held workshops, met with community and block associations, and participated in gardening and direct marketing events throughout the city. I can't tell you about every one. But I would like to mention a few of them because they demonstrate that besides growing food, the gardens with which we work grow gardeners and communities too.

As in other community gardens, many of the gardeners at the Center for the Blind had never gardened before. Like other gardeners, they went on the Garden Tour and were fascinated by the Chinatown Community Garden. And as in the other gardens, these people planted all the seedlings in their garden, many of which they had started themselves. They cultivated and tended the garden with the help of two sighted aides. They prepared all their own entries for the Harvest Party. The only help they received was with transportation and setting up materials at the Harvest Party. And despite a handicap other gardeners don't have, they won blue ribbons, as well as several second and third prizes at the Harvest Party.

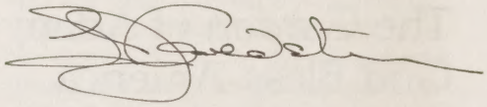
The Urban Gardening Program has worked closely with the Bridge, a residential center for youth with alcohol and drug problems and with Genesis II, a half-way house for people with drug problems. A prisoner involved in Holmsburg Detention Center's garden said, "I never thought this thing would be anything, but now I look around and just think 'we did this.'"

One of the most unique leadership situations has developed at St. Gabriel's Parish, where Fr. Louis Steingraber is in charge of the garden. It's run entirely by the kids, with some help from Father Lou's Silent Partner. A few prayers in the right direction have provided, exactly at the proper time, such things as fencing, seeds, plants, soil, rototiller — and winning lottery tickets. I don't know that we should count Urban Gardening Program's support as heavenly aid, but we did especially enjoy our contacts with this group.

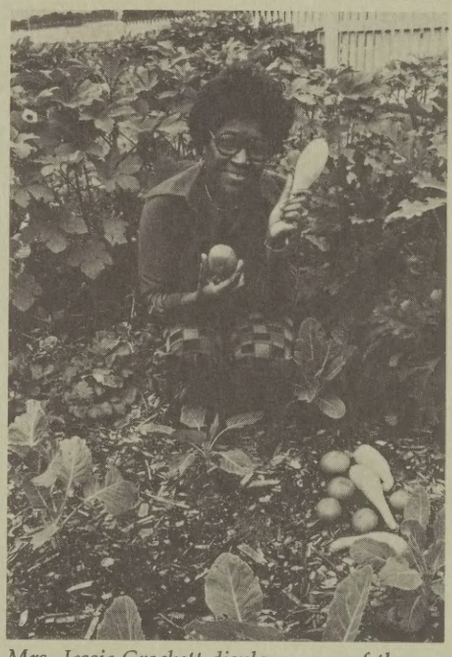
Urban Gardening Program personnel have worked with groups of senior citizens on container gardens, with a center for the mentally retarded, and with day care centers. We have worked with both public and archdiocesan schools in developing materials for gardening and nutrition projects for the classroom and conducting in-service workshops for teachers. Garden assistant Sally McCabe's classes and information sheets on hydroponic gardening have been especially popular with the school children and with people of all ages.

A gardener tends her plot at 3700 Brown Street in West Philadelphia.

And so on. To say it another way, the Urban Gardening Program is doing its declared task and then some — it's involved in community development too. And to a lot of Philadelphians, that's its most important accomplishment. We would like to thank the members of Congress who started it, the city officials and industries and organizations that supported it, the many volunteers who worked on it, and the several thousand people who wanted and needed it and who are both gardeners and precious harvest, for giving us the opportunity to work with such a heartening and worthwhile program.



Libby J. Goldstein, *Coordinator*
The Philadelphia Urban Gardening Program
of The Pennsylvania State University Cooperative Extension Service



Mrs. Jessie Crockett displays some of the rewards of urban gardening.

The End Result

Turning vacant lots full of bottles, bricks, and other debris into a City Green is no easy task. The Urban Gardening Program, with the cooperation of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, city officials, and other interested citizens, has had noteworthy success in accomplishing this result.

From a modest beginning in 1977, there are now more than 204 garden sites, not including the eight demonstration gardens, covering forty plus acres of land. These sites provide gardens yielding high-quality fresh vegetables for more than 6,000 families that participate in the Urban Gardening Program. The estimated dollar value of the average 200-square-foot family plot is $180.

Community gardens provide an interest and value beyond that of the harvest itself. They provide a low-cost or no-cost method of reclaiming vacant lots from safety and health hazards until a developer is found. They upgrade the neighborhood because of the added amenity value. The gardens provide a source of recreation and exercise. Last, but not least, community gardens generate in their participants the feeling that the land they tend is an extension of the neighborhood in which they live. This leads to fewer vandalism and trash disposal problems. This is the biggest thing to happen: the return to the community of self-worth, self-respect, and neighborhood pride.

It would seem from the expressed interest in Philadelphia that the Urban Gardening Program has come to the right place at the right time. Comments of the gardeners themselves illustrate this point.

"The garden is like a paradise in the midst of decay."

"I saved money growing my own vegetables."

"Gardening gave me the first chance to share good experiences with my neighbors."

"We've turned the community eyesore into a place of beauty."

"Working with the earth is like returning to my roots."

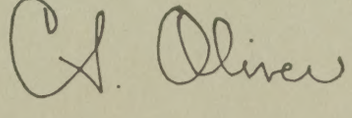
"I didn't used to eat vegetables much, but I'm sure eating 'em now."

"We don't have any problems with vandalism because someone is always watching the garden."

"You don't have to go crazy if you don't have a job."

It is apparent that gardening taps cultural and genetic roots reaching deep into prehistory. The feelings expressed by the gardeners in the Urban Gardening Program are so familiar that few of us have stopped to ponder their significance. Yet responses such as theirs probably reflect long-standing and subtle interactions between man and his environment. Since the early eighteenth century, it has been noted that an intimate association with plants can stimulate beneficial psychological and sociological responses. Plants are living things that return beauty and bounty for loving care regardless of the gardener's color, creed, or credentials.

This, then, is the end result of the Urban Gardening Program — a program Penn State's Cooperative Extension Service is proud of because it is helping people become more self-sufficient in their way of life.



Craig S. Oliver

If you would like to learn more about the Urban Gardening Program, phone

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